



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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YOUNG LEADER OF ALIEN SMUGGLING OPERATION GETS 10 YEAR SENTENCE

PHOENIX Arizona – Daniel Franco-Aragon, Age 20, of Sinaloa, Mexico, was sentenced here to 120 months by U.S. District Judge Neil V. Wake. Franco-Aragon had pleaded guilty on April 19, 2007 in two separate cases involving illegal aliens. He pleaded guilty to an Information charging him with Possessing or Brandishing a Firearm during and in relation to a crime of violence, specifically hostage taking in 2003. He also pleaded guilty to an Indictment charging him with Conspiracy to Harbor Illegal aliens in 2005.

The first case dates back to October 22, 2003 when 33 undocumented aliens were held hostage at house in Phoenix, AZ. The Phoenix Police Department located the residence while investigating multiple shootings at a west Phoenix restaurant which occurred on October 20, 2003. Also located at the residence were two rifles. While the aliens were held at the residence they were threatened with death and had guns pointed at them in order to force them to get someone to pay their ransom. Fourteen defendants were charged with hostage taking, harboring undocumented aliens, conspiracy to take hostages and conspiracy to harbor undocumented aliens and three are still at large: Anastacio Franco-Cabrera, Rigoberto Franco-Aragon and Hector Diaz-Osuna. Franco-Aragon is the 11th defendant to be sentenced. Mario Tirado-Sandoval, Rosalio Franco-Perez, Marcy Zuniga-Catellanos, Placido Antonio Salazar-Salazar, Freddy Mena-Blanco and Rene Alexi Martinez-Pozas pled guilty to Conspiracy to Harbor Illegal Aliens and were sentenced to 33 months, 46 months, 46 months, 63 months 37 months and 22 months respectively for their role in the conspiracy. Edil Orlando Guillen-Pineda, Ricardo Najera-Escobar, Eziquio Najera-Escobar, and Andres Njera-Escobar all pleaded guilty to Brandishing of a Firearm during and in relation to a crime of violence (hostage taking). Guillen-Pineda received 120 months while the other three defendants were sentenced to 84 months incarceration. Rosalio Franco-Perez pleaded guilty on August 3, 2007, to charges in Maricopa County Superior Court for the shootings that occurred at the west Phoenix Restaurant on October 20, 2003.

On January 12, 2005, 22 undocumented aliens were found at a residence located at Phoenix, Arizona. Also found were three smugglers who were harboring the aliens and two handguns. On February 10, 2005, 11 undocumented aliens were found at a residence located in Peoria, Arizona. Three of the 11 aliens were identified as alien smugglers. Investigation revealed that these houses were rented by the same person and that Franco-Aragon was in charge of both alien stash houses.

Even though Franco-Aragon was a juvenile at the time these crimes occurred, Judge Wake found that he had a leadership role in both cases. Judge Wake told the defendant that he was “sorry to say that you are a threat to re-offend” even if it is not in the United States. The Court imposed a 74

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month sentence for possession or brandishing a firearm in relation to a crime of violence and a 46 month sentence for Conspiracy to Harbor illegal aliens. The sentences are to be served consecutively for a total of 120 months.

The investigation in this case was conducted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Peoria Police Department and the Phoenix Police Department. The prosecution was handled by Lisa Jennis Settel, Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix, Arizona.

CASE NUMBER: CR-03-1188-PHX-NVW and CR-06-489-PHX-NVW
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